

Administration of Barack Obama, 2014

Remarks at a State Dinner Hosted by President Benigno S. Aquino III of the Philippines in Manila, Philippines

April 28, 2014

President Aquino. Please sit down. His Excellency, the Honorable President Obama; Vice President Jejomar Binay; former President Fidel Valdez Ramos, President Joseph Ejercito Estrada; Senate President Franklin Drilon, Members of the Senate present; Speaker Feliciano Belmonte, Jr., and all our Members of the House present; Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno and the Justices of the Supreme Court; Secretary Albert Del Rosario, Secretary Paquito Ochoa, members of the Cabinet; Ambassador Joey Cuisia; Ambassador Philip Goldberg, Ambassador Susan Rice, Ambassador Michael Froman; Mr. Rob Nabors; Excellencies of the diplomatic corps; distinguished members of the U.S. delegation; honored guests; ladies and gentlemen: Good evening.

Mr. President, on behalf of the Filipino people, I welcome you and your delegation to the Philippines. Though your stay here in our country may be short, I hope that it will allow you to see and experience for yourself how, indeed, it is more fun in the Philippines and that, undoubtedly, the Philippines works.

Mr. President, the historic friendship between our peoples has been punctuated by visits from your predecessors. Your visit, the eighth by a U.S. President, has been a long time coming, and it marks yet another important chapter in our relations. Your presence here today reaffirms the strong bond between our nations. As a friend and partner of the Filipino people, Mr. President, you have demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the growth and development of our nation.

It is only fitting, therefore, that your efforts be recognized with the conferment of the Order of Sikatuna. Since 1953, the highest recognition of diplomatic merit of the Republic of the Philippines has been the Order of Sikatuna. It is conferred on those who have fostered and elevated the bilateral partnership of our country with other nations.

Tonight I have the distinct pleasure to confer the highest rank, that of Raja, or Grand Collar, on you, Mr. President, for your leadership and policies that assisted the Philippines in times of natural disaster, for helping uphold stability and peace by means of the rule of law in Southeast Asia, and for working with us to fundamentally raise the defense capacity of our country.

[At this point, President Aquino's aides displayed the medal for President Obama.]

President Obama. Thank you.

President Aquino. Congratulations!

The first of your predecessors to receive this distinction was Venerable Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1960. Then as now, may this conferment symbolize our nation's esteem for the American people and may serve as a reminder of the mutual desire to always be partners based on the highest principles of liberty, democracy and progress.

Mr. President, our discussions today highlighted the ongoing dialogue and cooperation between our two countries as we adapt and respond to the changing circumstances and the paramount challenges of the 21st century. The world has come to realize that stability is a

necessary foundation of progress and prosperity for all our peoples. Alliances are deepened not only through our shared history, but also through mutual confidence and respect, which is constantly refreshed to give new relevance and purpose to our positive, longstanding relations.

We are bound by the quest to turn our shared principles of democracy, human rights, and freedom into an inclusive reality not just for our respective peoples, but for all nations.

Mr. President, I've always taken to heart that in an increasingly complex world, it is incumbent upon all of us to be part of the solution and not of the problem. From the very first meeting we had in New York in 2010 to this night, you and I—and the members of our respective administrations—have worked together as partners and friends, finding ways to promote common understanding and to develop meaningful solutions to a great number of our era's dilemmas.

Whether in strengthening our trade relations, security alliances, and people-to-people engagements or encouraging more nations to commit to the Open Government Partnership, an area where the Philippines continues to innovate, we continue to challenge ourselves to answer the pressing questions of these times: By what means can be—can peace be sustained? Through what instruments can poverty and the effects of climate change and calamity be addressed? And to whose benefit will our mutual and collective undertakings redound?

The answer, of course, lies in the maintenance and deepening of the alliance we share, whether in building a Southeast Asia that champions the rule of law or in advancing the belief that the most certain way to prosperity is to actively seek a harmonious relationship with all nations.

Mr. President, through this brief visit of yours, I am confident that you have witnessed firsthand how such values, our shared beliefs and principles, can transform a society as it has ours.

On this note, Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, please rise as I propose a toast. To the good health, happiness, and success of our dear friend President Obama and his family, to the continuing closeness and affection between Filipinos and Americans, and to the realization of our common vision of a more stable, more prosperous, and more inclusive international community.

[A toast was offered.]

President. We say "*buhay*."

President Obama. *Buhay*. Cheers.

Well, thank you so much. *Magandang gabi*. *[Laughter]* President Aquino, distinguished guests, on behalf of my delegation and myself, I want to thank you for the magnificent welcome today and thank you for your gracious hospitality this evening.

Mr. President, I am deeply honored to receive the Order of the Sikatuna. I accept it in the spirit in which it has been bestowed, with a commitment to continuing to deepen the bonds between our two great nations.

To all the gentlemen here this evening, you look very good, but I think you'll agree that the women outshine you in the vibrant colors of the Philippines. *[Laughter]* I have only been here 1 day, but the kindness that you've shown me and the extraordinary hospitality that's been extended to us leaves us with very warm feelings and reflects, I think, the legendary spirit of the Filipino people.

I'm told that you have a word to describe this, the inner feeling, that core of a person's being: *kalooban*. [Laughter] We see this spirit in a family that's given itself to this country. There is no greater nobility than offering one's life to the nation and, Mr. President, your father offered his life so that this nation might be free. Your mother and the citizens of this great nation who took to the streets showed the world that true power lies with people. And with the canonization of Pope John Paul II, we also honor the role that the Catholic Church played in supporting the Filipino people and their desire for freedom.

Noynoy, you bear the scars of those who would have taken this nation backwards. And you carry on your family's noble tradition of service, in your commitment to the dignity and prosperity of the Filipino people.

We also see the spirit of this nation in all that you have overcome: colonialism and occupation, invasion and the dictatorship. Yours is a fierce independence, won through sacrifice and renewed with each generation. And we saw that again this year. After Yolanda, America grieved with you and stood with you. But we were also inspired by your resilience and your determination to care for those who had been affected.

Tonight our hearts actually grieve for some of our fellow Americans back home who have been devastated by very terrible storms and tornadoes, but we draw strength from your example. For even as we grieve, we know that we will recover and we will rebuild in these communities that have been affected because people will care after each other.

You bring that same strength and solidarity to our alliance. So let me say tonight on behalf of the American people: We are honored and proud to call you an ally and a friend. Through our treaty alliance, the United States has an ironclad commitment to defend you, your security, and your independence.

And finally, we feel our spirit—our *kalooban*—in the friendship between our peoples that expresses itself in so many ways. There's our mutual obsession with basketball. [Laughter] There's our mutual admiration for Manny Pacquiao—[laughter]—even if sometimes, he's fighting against Americans, and it doesn't turn out the way we'd like. [Laughter]

There's our shared pride in the millions of Filipino Americans who contribute to our Nation every single day. There's one in particular I'm grateful for: Cris Comerford, our Executive Chef at the White House. Cris was born in Manila. She still has family here. Thanks to her, we in the White House enjoy the occasional lumpia and adobo. [Laughter]

So I want to propose a toast: To our gracious host, President Aquino; to the alliance that keeps us strong and free; and to the friendship between our peoples, may it always endure, across the ocean and in our hearts.

Mabuhay.

[A toast was offered.]

President Obama. Cheers.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:24 p.m. at Malacanang Palace. In his remarks, he referred to professional boxer Manny Pacquiao. President Aquino referred to Executive Secretary Paquito Ochoa, Jr., Minister of Foreign Affairs Alberto Del Rosario, Ambassador to the U.S. Jose Cuisia, Jr., of the Philippines; and U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines Philip S. Goldberg.

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